

AMENDMENT

Amendments to the Claims: Please replace all prior versions and listings of claims with the following listing of claims.

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1-179. (Cancelled)

180. (New) A method for detecting postage fraud using a unique mail piece indicium, comprising:

reading, at the United States Postal Service, a one-dimensional bar code representative of an indexing tracking identifier, the one-dimensional bar code being located on a mail piece handled by the United States Postal Service, and wherein a postage indicium comprising a two-dimensional bar code is further located on the mail piece;

transmitting a postage indicium request from the United States Postal Service to a vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system, wherein the postage indicium request includes the indexing tracking identifier that the one-dimensional bar code represents; and

receiving, at the United States Postal Service, data corresponding to the requested postage indicium from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system, wherein the United States Postal Service submits the mail piece for delivery in response to the data corresponding to the requested postage indicium indicating that the postage indicium located on the mail piece is valid.

181. (New) The method of claim 180, wherein the indexing tracking identifier comprises a delivery confirmation code.

182. (New) The method of claim 180, wherein the data corresponding to the requested postage indicium represents one or more of a postage amount, a date and time of postage information creation, a service class, an optional data advance, or a delivery zip code.

183. (New) The method of claim 180, wherein the mail piece further comprises the indexing tracking identifier in a human-readable format.

184. (New) The method of claim 180, wherein the United States Postal Service reads the two-dimensional bar code located on the mail piece subsequent to transmitting the postage indicium request to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system.

185. (New) The method of claim 180, further comprising:
generating the indexing tracking identifier at the United States Postal Service; and
sending the generated indexing tracking identifier from the United States Postal Service, wherein the United States Postal Service generates and sends the indexing tracking identifier prior to reading the one-dimensional bar code located on the mail piece.

186. (New) The method of claim 185, wherein the United States Postal Service sends the generated indexing tracking identifier to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system.

187. (New) The method of claim 180, wherein the two-dimensional bar code is readable to provide the data corresponding to the requested postage indicium.

188. (New) The method of claim 187, wherein the data corresponding to the requested postage indicium comprises the indexing tracking identifier and either a meter number or an account number.

189. (New) The method of claim 187, wherein the data corresponding to the requested postage indicium includes digitally signed data.

190. **(New)** The method of claim 180, wherein the two-dimensional bar code is readable to provide the data corresponding to the requested postage indicium and the indexing tracking identifier.

191. **(New)** The method of claim 180, further comprising:

generating the indexing tracking identifier at the United States Postal Service in response to the United States Postal Service receiving an indexing tracking identifier request from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system; and

sending the generated indexing tracking identifier from the United States Postal Service to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system, wherein the United States Postal Service generates and sends the indexing tracking identifier prior to reading the one-dimensional bar code located on the mail piece.

192. **(New)** The method of claim 180, wherein the two-dimensional bar code is readable to provide a meter number that is not part of the indexing tracking identifier.

193. **(New)** The method of claim 180, wherein the two-dimensional bar code is readable to provide an account number that is not part of the indexing tracking identifier.

194. **(New)** The method of claim 180, wherein the United States Postal Service transmits the postage indicium to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system and receives the data corresponding to the requested postage indicium from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system over a network.

195. **(New)** The method of claim 194, further comprising displaying the data corresponding to the requested postage indicium at the United States Postal Service.

196. (New) The method of claim 195, further comprising verifying proof of payment for the postage indicium located on the mail piece from the data displayed at the United States Postal Service.

197. (New) The method of claim 195, wherein the data displayed at the United States Postal Service comprises a sender address for the mail piece.

198. (New) A system for detecting postage fraud using a unique mail piece indicium, comprising:

- a computer system located at the United States Postal Service; and

- a network connection that links the computer system located at the United States Postal Service to a vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system, wherein the computer system located at the United States Postal Service is configured to:

- read a one-dimensional bar code located on a mail piece handled by the United States Postal Service, the one-dimensional bar code representative of an indexing tracking identifier, and wherein a postage indicium comprising a two-dimensional bar code is further located on the mail piece;

- transmit a postage indicium request to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system, wherein the postage indicium request includes the indexing tracking identifier that the one-dimensional bar code represents; and

- receive data corresponding to the requested postage indicium from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system, wherein the United States Postal Service submits the mail piece for delivery in response to the data corresponding to the requested postage indicium indicating that the postage indicium located on the mail piece is valid.

199. (New) The system of claim 198, wherein the indexing tracking identifier comprises a delivery confirmation code.

200. (New) The system of claim 198, wherein the data corresponding to the requested postage indicium represents one or more of a postage amount, a date and time of postage information creation, a service class, an optional data advance, or a delivery zip code.

201. (New) The system of claim 198, wherein the mail piece further comprises the indexing tracking identifier in a human-readable format.

202. (New) The system of claim 198, wherein the computer system located at the United States Postal Service is further configured to read the two-dimensional bar code located on the mail piece subsequent to transmitting the postage indicium request to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system.

203. (New) The system of claim 198, wherein the computer system located at the United States Postal Service is further configured to:

generate the indexing tracking identifier; and

send the generated indexing tracking identifier over the network connection, wherein the computer system located at the United States Postal Service is configured to generate and send the indexing tracking identifier prior to reading the one-dimensional bar code located on the mail piece.

204. (New) The system of claim 203, wherein the computer system located at the United States Postal Service is configured to send the generated indexing tracking identifier to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system over the network connection.

205. (New) The system of claim 198, wherein the two-dimensional bar code is readable to provide the data corresponding to the requested postage indicium.

206. (New) The system of claim 205, wherein the data corresponding to the requested postage indicium comprises the indexing tracking identifier and either a meter number or an account number.

207. (New) The system of claim 205, wherein the data corresponding to the requested postage indicium includes digitally signed data.

208. (New) The system of claim 198, wherein the two-dimensional bar code is readable to provide the data corresponding to the requested postage indicium and the indexing tracking identifier.

209. (New) The system of claim 198, wherein the computer system located at the United States Postal Service is further configured to:

generate the indexing tracking identifier in response to receiving an indexing tracking identifier request from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system; and

send the generated indexing tracking identifier to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system over the network connection, wherein the computer system located at the United States Postal Service is configured to generate and send the indexing tracking identifier prior to reading the one-dimensional bar code located on the mail piece.

210. (New) The system of claim 198, wherein the two-dimensional bar code is readable to provide a meter number that is not part of the indexing tracking identifier.

211. (New) The system of claim 198, wherein the two-dimensional bar code is readable to provide an account number that is not part of the indexing tracking identifier.

212. (New) The system of claim 198, wherein the computer system located at the United States Postal Service is configured to transmit the postage indicium to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system and receive the data corresponding to the requested postage

indicium from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system over the network connection.

213. **(New)** The system of claim 212, wherein the computer system located at the United States Postal Service is further configured to display the data corresponding to the requested postage indicium.

214. **(New)** The system of claim 213, wherein the United States Postal Service verifies proof of payment for the postage indicium located on the mail piece from the data displayed at the computer system located at the United States Postal Service.

215. **(New)** The system of claim 213, wherein the data displayed at the computer system located at the United States Postal Service comprises a sender address for the mail piece.